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San Jose State University, School of Journalism and Mass Communications

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access



**BRINGING THE
BIZARRE TO LIFE**

a&e



OCT. 2011 | ISSUE 1
SJSUACCESSMAG.COM

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Two restaurants, two men and two very different stories, both delivering a bit of local flavor.



cover & Table
of contents
photography
by Andrea
Henneman



Everybody has a story.

From an artist with a passion for painting to a 78-year-old woman serving up sandwiches, each person we interact with has a past that brought them to the place and person they are today.

When our modest staff of 12 set out on the mission of inventing our vision of Access Magazine, we were compelled to explore the lives and histories of those around us.

What we found was that a city's culture is defined not by what exists within its borders, but by the people who bring it to life.

San José has long been a center for innovation and imagination, but there are countless individuals within our city whose talents are often overlooked.

Within these eight pages of our first issue, we have tried to bring the personalities of San José to our readers, hoping you will find their stories as fascinating as we did.

Jaimie Collins

Jaimie Collins

STAFF

JAIMIE COLLINS
Editor-in-chief

DANIEL HERBERHOLZ
Managing editor

CHRIS MARIAN
Content editor

ANGELICA VALERA
Chief Designer

LEO POSTOVOIT
Art director

JESSE JONES
Photo editor

DANREB VICTORIO
web editor

JOEY AKELEY
RYAN FERNANDEZ
Copy editors

LAILA BARAKAT
NATALIE CABRAL
Editors-at-large

MATTHEW TYE
Promotions manager

ANDREA HENNEMAN
JAY MANALO
JESSE JONES
STAN OLSZEWSKI
Photographers

SPECIAL THANKS
TIM MITCHELL
Design adviser
San José State University
School of Journalism &
Mass Communications

Connect with us online!
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@SJSUAccessMag

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BY REGINA AQUINO
Photography by stan olszewski

Sonia's Owner: the Sage of Sandwiches

In an era where everything is fast-paced and convenient, there is little room to consider the time and hard work put into things we take for granted.

A prime example of this is the food we consume and the establishments in which we choose to dine. When taking that first bite, it is rare that one will think about the story behind the meal.

Satisfying appetites since 1981, Sonia's Kitchen is a San José staple that not only boasts a delicious menu at a manageable price, but also offers service with a smile from a woman everyone loves.

The current owner of Sonia's Kitchen, 78-year-old Elpi Barrera, emigrated from the Philippines in 1969. With the support of her husband and family, she made the decision to buy Sonia's Kitchen after it went up for sale.

"Before I took over, somebody else had already started the restaurant — same décor, same menu, everything," she said. "I think they started in 1978. The one who started the restaurant was Sonia. When we took over, we just kept the name."

The restaurant serves a variety of cheesesteaks and burgers, all cooked to order at a wallet-friendly

price. Burgers are as cheap as \$1.60 and a hefty cheesesteak is \$5.50. Outside, the restaurant is charming, painted green and yellow with a retro feel. The inside is tiny — there no dining room, but customers can sit outside while they enjoy their food.

Taking over Sonia's Kitchen was a life-changing decision for Barrera because of the financial and managerial responsibility of the already well-known eatery.

"Never in my mind did I think about (owning a) business," she said. "It's hard because we had to borrow all the money, but we were able to do it because (the restaurant) was already established — the name and a lot of students were already coming here."

Barrera also recognizes the changing economy and what that means for her customers. Since she has been running Sonia's Kitchen for 30 years, she has seen the difference between students' spending power back then compared to now.

"At the time, the students really had money because they were able to get grants and pay for everything," she said. "But now, students are really hard up. They're really spending pennies just to buy something to eat."



Doesn't this sandwich look scrumptious? The PHILLY cheesesteak is the entrée for which Sonia's Kitchen is known.

Elpi Barrera, left, is the wizard behind the wonder that is Sonia's Kitchen's cheesesteak.

Working the counter and taking orders Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Barrera is known to remember the favorites of her regulars. Her energy and enthusiasm are reflected in the way she engages with all who walk through the door. With the help of her youngest son, Barrera has been able to manage Sonia's Kitchen and keep customers coming for more.

Andre Marigny, a senior radio, television and film major, said he has been a loyal customer of Sonia's Kitchen since 2006.

"She's always showing us love," he said. "When I go in, she'll always say hi and tells me she hasn't seen me in a while. We always just keep supporting her."

Barrera said that meeting different types of people is the best perk of her job.

"They have good news for you, they have bad news and you learn a lot," she said. "A lot of times, you can get a bit worried about something and then you hear something that is nice and you forget what you are thinking about. It's therapy."

Kevin Ong, a junior engineering major, is new to Sonia's Kitchen and said he is already a devoted customer.

"After that first time, I really liked it so I decided to come back," he said. "I like how it's close to campus and I've already told a lot of my friends about this place."

When asked how long she plans on running Sonia's Kitchen, Barrera explained that she does not have plans to retire in the near future.

"I don't know if I'm a workaholic, but I just don't want to stay home," she said. "I kind of enjoy being out of the house."

A mother of four children, Barrera said her family is always urging her to take a break because she works so much. Her response to them is that she'll work as long as she can walk.

"Now I am 78," she said. "They tell me to stop and hang around — you know, take a vacation, (but it's) not for me." •

Sonia's Kitchen
360 E. William Street
San José, CA 95112

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right: wädl's pet gecko, Mr. Snuggles, observes his owner's artwork.



Above: wädl uses his fingers to manipulate the details of one of his paintings.

Below: The octopus is a common motif in wädl's artwork.



Wädl at Work

BY ASHLEY ALLEN
 Photography by Jay Manalo

The process starts with Wädl perching his pet gecko, Mr. Snuggles, on his shoulder to watch as the artist holds a spray can toward a canvas.

Stencils pulled from a milk crate are used to create a variety of textures and patterns as brushes stroke the painting with precision. His hand dips into black paint and smears across the canvas.

Patrick Hofmeister, also known as Wädl, was born and raised in San José. As a child, he spent his afternoons sketching the visions of his imagination on sketchpads. It was a hobby he enjoyed immensely until middle school.

"Kids were mean," he explained. "They told me I sucked (and) I just bought into it and was like, 'Fuck, I should stop.'"

Throughout high school and into his late teens, Hofmeister became entranced with the rave culture and experimented heavily with drugs. Out of frustration with his lack of ambition, Hofmeister's mother, Jeannine Atondo, kicked him out of the house. He ended up staying with friends for a couple of years, but eventually, at the age of 20, found himself homeless.

His sister, Rosealee Atondo, introduced him to Marcus Are, who worked at the Transitional Housing Program at the Bill Wilson Center in Downtown San José. Are convinced Hofmeister to move off the street and become a resident at the center.

"(He was) my mentor and house monitor at the time...(and) was like 'Well, you have a curfew. What else are you going to do? Start painting,'" Hofmeister said.

wädl complements his uses of spray paint with a variety of brush techniques in his artwork.

That year, the Bill Wilson Center made Christmas a joyous holiday for Hofmeister by buying him his first easel and paint set. That same year, Hofmeister's father, Richard, gave him a 4-by-4-foot canvas. Hofmeister finally touched a paintbrush to canvas and started to refer to himself as Wädl.

Eventually, Wädl landed a job at Tandoori Oven and left the Bill Wilson Center. He was a diligent worker and slowly made his way up the ranks, becoming the general manager in three years. Life seemed great — the bills were getting paid and while working at Tandoori Oven often made life hectic, Wädl still found time for his art.

Although he was working on his art in his free time, Wädl didn't get serious about painting until the day a disheveled-looking customer came into the restaurant.

"He looked like he got dressed in a closet," Wädl said. "I said, 'You look like you're an (art) director,' and he said, 'Actually, I am.'"

Wädl was speaking to George Rivera, an art teacher at Mission College and the executive director and senior curator of the Triton Museum of Art in Santa Clara.

Rivera attended an art show Wädl was hosting out of his house and was impressed with his talent.

"Immediately I could see the presence of something very special and potentially strong," Rivera said.

"(Rivera) asked me, 'What school did you go to?' and I said, 'I didn't go to school,'" Wädl said.

Following the show, Rivera invited Wädl to attend one of his art classes.

"He said I was doing work that was better than graduates from college and I'm self-taught," Wädl said.

"That kind of surprised me. He wanted me to see where I was in relation to students."

In 2009, Wädl attended his first class.

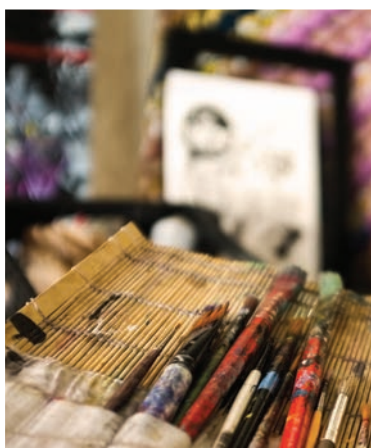
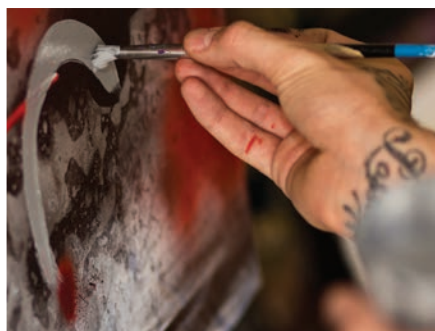
"(Wädl) was one of the best students I've had and I've been teaching studio art for over 30 years," Rivera said. "He was in class for a purpose. This was going to be his life and you felt it."

The relationship between Wädl and Rivera grew stronger as the artist shared his goals and asked for advice.

"While I was there, I'd tell him about my visions," Wädl said. "I wanted to do a big-ass painting that takes so much time and he said, 'If not now, when?'"

Taking Rivera's advice to heart, Wädl began work on "Octopi & Wasps," a piece that took 216 hours to finish, spread over eight months, all while working full time.

"I kind of isolated myself," Wädl said when asked about his social life at the time. "But I wasn't happy."





Flames

Rick Fleming GENERAL MANAGER

- ◆ I SEE that kids here at San José State are very respectable. The kids don't bother nobody. They come in, they act like ladies and gentlemen. Basically it's just a downtown environment — a good place to have a good time.
- ◆ I'VE GOT a huge following. I love my following. I've got kids inviting me to their weddings now. That makes me feel good. I had kids that were babies I carried to the table, and now they're bringing their kids.
- ◆ PEOPLE STILL follow me (from Original Joe's). They say "Thank you for your help" — makes you feel like a million bucks. It's a great feeling.
- ◆ I'M ABOUT the spur of the moment. Like that, boom boom boom, I let it go.
- ◆ A LOT of people say, how do you hold it? How do you not get stressed out? Believe me, I get stressed out sometimes.
- ◆ I WAS at Original Joe's for 37 years. My mom worked over there also for 46 years, my grandpa worked there and my brothers worked there, you know — we all worked

"I'm about the spur of the moment."



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sjsuaccessmag.com/?p=12345

One Street, Two Local Legends

BY DAVID KHEDRY & DANIEL HERBERHOLZ photography by Andrea Henneman

- ◆ I CAME to the United States in 1980, and we save money for a small business. My family looking for business.
- ◆ BIG FAMILY sometimes you be helping for the business. But two sisters in high school, one sister getting married — so only me and my daddy, and we do it like that.
- ◆ ONE OF the interesting is, we don't have any background in cooking. Actually I never eat any hamburger before. I think, (the food was) OK, that's why I think we got a lot of business.
- ◆ MY DADDY passed away in 2002. So that's when I take over.
- ◆ A LOT of people thinking I'm always here, they thinking I'm owner, but I'm not owner legally until 2002. But my daddy retired in 1990, but I do all this operation.
- ◆ I 'M MARRIED, I have three daughters. One in graduate school, one in college, one in high school. I trying for boy, but the youngest one was a girl.
- ◆ THEY ARE probably learning from me, to educate better. Physical work is so hard, small business so hard.
- ◆ THEY PROBABLY more educate, you know, better job. That's why I said, "You've got to educate, you get a job — not like me, like daddy."
- ◆ USED TO be, in Korea, I'm some kind of very fun, funny guy. I like singing, sometimes party guy. But I came to the United States, I lost friends like that.
- ◆ I USED to like (karaoke) singing, but I just go sleep, you know, rest.
- ◆ I CAN make a real party on Sunday night. I

can do that, I'm scary. I'll control myself too. Unsafe, who can help? Only me, looks like no back up. Always control myself.

◆ BUT I look at the picture of all my friends in Korea, looks like I'm almost younger than anybody. That's why I'm surprised, I can control. I am healthy. I am a young mind always. That's why all my friends call, they ask "You still hair jelled?" Yes.

◆ I SERVED after war. You've got taxes to do here — same thing. You had to serve in the South Korean army, and you had to finish, clear — you can go here.

◆ THIS TIME is now very new style army. My time was very different. More tough, more hungry, more cold, you know. Whatever we had hard here, we've had in the army. So I like it, I enjoy life actually.

"I've seen a lot of students the last 29 years. I've enjoyed it, actually."

- there. We knew we wanted to be in the restaurant business.
- ◆ THIS FAMILY asked me to open this restaurant up, so I've been here (at Flames) with this family — I went from Italian to Greek.
- ◆ I'M ITALIAN-IRISH, my mother is full-blooded Sicilian.
- ◆ I GREW up in east side San José. When I was little, I (lived) between Alma and Story Road, when it used to be all berry farms and ranches. Then it started, you know, going downhill.
- ◆ IF YOU'RE getting into the restaurant (business) and you are going to stay in restaurants, you have to got to learn how to say no. Every night in this bar — "Rick, let's do a shot, let's do a shot, let's do a shot." If I do a shot every night here...I'd be done. That's the truth.

You've probably seen these two faces before.

Rick Fleming greets and seats you when you enter Flames Eatery and Bar on the corner of San Fernando and Fourth streets. Just down the block, Myun Chang says "hello" and "how are you?" as he asks for your cash at Peanuts Deluxe Cafe. In interviews, each noted an adoration for their "following." Over the years, their following continually comes back for service, lets them cut in line at Disneyland, and glue Ricky and Myun in their memories as part of their experience at SJSU. Here are the highlights from those interviews, about their followings, their life and their advice.

- ◆ VERY BORING life, very simple life anyway. I'm working, morning to five o'clock — except Sunday though. But my experience (in the) army, was good experience. I learned a lot over there.
- ◆ MAYBE MY strong mind. "You can do it, I can do it," like that, you know? Nothing impossible. No rules like that. You try hard, maybe you can make it.
- ◆ MY BUSINESS the same thing. Small business, lot of new style, very nice restaurants. I've served downtown the last 29 years, but I'm still surviving. That's why, you know, impossible? Anything possible.
- ◆ I THANK God. I've seen a lot of students, the last 29 years. I've enjoyed it actually. I'm 55 years old, but I'm feeling like young always, because of young blood.

- ◆ THIS BUSINESS, that's all this is — eating and drinking, eating and drinking. Nightlife, that's all it is, and I learned it. Shit, it was 1987, they told me I had to go seek help because every table I had a glass of brandy, every table. People buying me drinks, buying me drinks. I'd sit there and party with them and get all fucked up.
- ◆ OH, OUTSIDE the restaurant, I party like a big dog. You wouldn't know who I am.
- ◆ I LIKE hot rods. I'm a motorhead — I've got a nice hot rod. I like Harleys. I had a Harley, I sold that — I never got to ride it.
- ◆ YOU GO through the grooves and ride a Harley, going up to about 110 miles down the freeway — you're feelin' good.
- ◆ DEPENDING ON what you want, you've got to drive to get what you need. Once you

have it, lock it in — because you never know what's comin' the next day. Whatever you do, you know you can always be replaceable.

- ◆ WHEN THESE guys (at Flames) approached me...I wasn't really ready for it. It was handed to me more or less. And yes, I wanted it. It's a big goal, but I conquered it.
- ◆ ALL THESE kids going to school, they're striving for a goal and they're striving hard. Once they get that goal, lock it in and keep it secure. 'Cause if you don't, then it's just gonna keep going down downhill, and it's hard getting back up the hill again. •



Flames Eatery and Bar

88 S. 4th St.
408.971.1960

Regular hours:

wed-sat

7 a.m. to 12 a.m.

Sun-Tues

7 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Happy hour:

3 to 6 p.m.

9 p.m. to close



Myun Chang OWNER

Peanuts



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Fernando St.
408.998.9778
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to 7:30 p.m.
Sat 7:30 a.m.
to 5:30 p.m.
closed Sunday
Happy hour:
2 to 4 p.m.
Monday
to Friday

OCTOBER

Calendar of Events



**13: ACCESS FALL 2011
ISSUE 1 LAUNCH!**

14 & 15: Performed by San José State's theater department, the comedic **"Dead Man's Cell Phone"** analyzes how society honors the dead, following how a woman confronts her ideas about life, death and connecting in a world dependent on technology.

15 & 16: Hosted by the historic town of Campbell, this year's **Oktoberfest** is serving up authentic German dishes accompanied by a thirst-quenching mix of brews. With live entertainment, games and vendors, the two-day event is the perfect way to spend the weekend.

21: Gearing up on the third Friday of every month, the **San José Bike Party** is an up-and-coming social activity in the bay, drawing hundreds of riders to its themed outings. This month marks the fourth anniversary of the largest monthly bike ride in California. This month's theme is "The Rapture," so grab your horns or your halo and get pedaling.

22 & 23: Celebrating its 25th anniversary, this year's **Bridge School Benefit concert** at Shoreline Amphitheater is showcasing the talents of Dave Matthews, Neil Young, Arcade Fire, Mumford & Sons and more. Created by Neil Young and his wife, the all-acoustic event is a non-profit concert with all funds raised benefiting the Bridge School.

29: Known for hosting a range of local bands and DJs, **the Blank Club** is getting into the holiday spirit this month and hosting a Halloween dance party. Come dressed in a costume and get \$2 off the cover charge.



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